

## Sleeping through Class to Success

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# **Sleeping through Class to Success**

## **Japanese notions of time and diligence**

**Brigitte Steger**

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**ABSTRACT.** Japanese high-school students often study until late into the night and sacrifice their sleep in order to pass entrance and other exams. On the other hand, they often take a nap in the (late) afternoon, and daytime napping or *inemuri* is widely tolerated. This article asks what cultural and social sense it makes to keep students up for studying, when they cannot concentrate on what is being said in class. It examines notions of time and diligence based on the ethnographic findings and analyses sleep, especially *inemuri*, from sociological perspective. **KEY WORDS** • diligence • high school • Japan • sleep • time

### **Introduction**

Japanese are known for their long working hours and, in the extreme: *karōshi*, death from overwork. Yet, even the most diligent people need recuperation. In this article, I look at attitudes towards punctuality, perseverance, diligence, long working/study hours and other work- and time-related values from the perspective of sleep and sleep patterns, demonstrated by high-school students. High-school students attempting to enter a university with a good reputation are urged to follow the slogan ‘*yontō goraku*’, or ‘four [hours of sleep] pass, five fail’ and curtail night-time sleep, while everyone takes it for granted that students sleep not only on the train, but even in class. This public sleep is called *inemuri* (literally, to be present and asleep) and can be observed in many social situa-

tions. I have become interested in how to explain the discrepancy between the demand for sacrificing nocturnal sleep and the tolerance of day-time napping.

If sleeping in bed or on a futon is considered a sign of laziness, then isn't sleeping during an event or at work even more so an expression of loafing on the job? What cultural and social sense does it make to demand that young people stay up until late at night to study when they fall asleep during the day? How does the observation of frequent *inemuri* fit with the image of the Japanese as diligent people? What does this say about values and practice of time, time use, and work ethics?

I start from the assumption that 'social coexistence would cease to be gratifying – or even bearable – if [humankind] could not regularly renounce their consciousness of it' (Schwartz, 1973: 19). Like every social organization, Japanese society exhibits structural features that both guarantee the regular performance of duties and ensure release from such performance. Sleep is probably the most regular release from pressures. People are released not only from external pressures such as social ties and demands, but also from the internal pressures of psychological forces. As reflected in the English saying 'to be dead to the world,' the sleeper is unavailable to society in the sense that he/she does not direct his/her consciousness to this society.

Parallel to temporary liberation from everyday duties, sleep is also a necessary preparation for these duties, at least in the mindset of modern western societies. Workers and students have not only the right to rest; they also have a responsibility to recuperate physically and mentally. The question of the extent to which rest and withdrawal from social life are necessary and desirable and the form in which this should occur is constantly being negotiated between various social powers and interest groups. One way of doing this is to set aside certain times for work, leisure, family, rest and sleep. According to Edward Hall (1983: 44–58; see also Tsuji and Yuasa in this volume) this is characteristic of 'monochronic', clock-oriented societies. There are also societies in which people tend to do several things at once and are more event oriented, coined 'polychronic' by Hall. Although it makes sense to differentiate between these two time structures theoretically, in reality, even in monochronic cultures, nobody is always and exclusively engaged in the activity at hand. There are ways to 'get away' *within* active social life as well, as I will explain later. However, polychronic cultures reveal more elaborate structures that allow work and rest simultaneously. I suggest that *inemuri* in the classroom can be understood as a 'subordinate involvement' (Goffman, 1963: 44), which is subjected to the rules concerning such involvements and allows recuperation during the performance of duties, thereby reinforcing rules of conduct.

After a short statistical and ethnographic description of high-school students' sleep patterns, I will elaborate on issues pertaining to education, work ethics and time. I will demonstrate that curtailing night-time sleep and tolerating *inemuri*

are two sides of the same coin that reflect the Japanese notion of diligence and time consciousness. Being diligent is measured on a subjective scale by the efforts one makes. These efforts can be judged only indirectly in at least three ways: by the hours one works (especially at night), by the busyness one reveals, and by the exhaustion and consequent *inemuri* the nocturnal work session causes.

I started out conducting research on different aspects of sleep in Japan (Steger, 2004) in the mid-1990s, two of the main methods being participant observation and narrative interviews, which helped me shape the topics and formulate research questions. I have returned to the field several times; the last round of interviews and group discussions on students' sleep culture was conducted in February 2006 in a technical high-school in Osaka, a high school in Uji (near Kyoto) and with a few high school teachers from Kyoto. In addition, I critically examined medical studies on sleeping behaviour as well as time-use surveys. Other sources include regulations, diaries, belle-lettres, media reports, and visual representations, although sleep is hardly the central topic of these sources.

### High-school Students: Statistical and Ethnographic Description

According to time-use surveys conducted by the Public Broadcasting Corporation NHK, high-school students are the social group with the second least amount of sleep in Japan. (Although schooling is no longer mandatory after completion of middle school, nearly 97 per cent of the 16- to 18-year-olds attend high school.) They are only surpassed by the group of 40- to 49-year-old women who are most likely these students' mothers. On an average weekday in October 1995, 16- to 18-year-olds claim to spend merely 6:58 hours in bed (Mitsuya, 1996: 89–90).<sup>1</sup>

Students preparing for the entrance exams for one of the highly competitive universities are urged to keep their sleep to a minimum. A great number of young people also attend one of the numerous *juku* (private classes), which offer help in mastering the exam material in smaller groups and direct preparation for the exams. When these young people return home, they still have to do their homework and memorizing. Not all children are, however, exposed to 'examination hell'. There are also many young people who have already given up the competition for a variety of reasons. High-school students who spend an above-average amount of time learning and at lessons spend only 6:03 hours in bed and rest for 24 minutes during the day. The group of students who, apart from class, are not at all involved with studying, sleep on average one and a half hours more, namely 7:32 hours, and rest 15 minutes during the day (Mitsuya, 1996: 100–1). Statistically, there is clearly a relation between studying and sleep reduction.

**TABLE 1**  
**Night-time sleep patterns of high-school students**

	(n)	bedtime (h:m) weekdays		waking time (h:m) weekdays		sleep length (h:m) weekdays		sleep length (h:m) weekends	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Primary school									
First year	(14)	21:12	57	6:43	26	9:31	57	10:43	60
Second	(21)	21:05	45	6:49	22	9:32	61	10:34	41
Third	(25)	21:16	24	6:46	25	9:30	23	10:29	74
Fourth	(28)	21:33	50	6:46	20	9:14	39	10:19	136
Fifth	(41)	21:39	40	6:48	17	9:10	45	10:20	93
Sixth	(41)	22:06	38	6:49	16	8:43	38	10:12	102
Junior high school									
Seventh	(64)	22:44	49	6:51	26	8:07	50	9:43	113
Eighth	(62)	23:06	52	6:55	18	7:49	55	8:47	117
Ninth	(34)	23:42	76	7:00	28	7:20	66	9:11	120
High school									
Tenth	(73)	23:41	52	6:48	31	7:07	57	9:30	169
Eleventh	(46)	23:56	55	6:41	37	6:46	64	9:13	186
Twelfth	(63)	24:07	79	6:52	29	6:46	76	9:17	142

*Source:* Shinkoda et al. (2000: 288)

*Note:* Means (*M*) and Standard Deviations (*SD*) of sleep variables according to grade of students in Shimonoseki, Kyushu. In the survey, parents (550 day-time workers from 19 randomly selected companies) were asked to let their offsprings aged 6 to 18 fill out two surveys, 512 students (53%) responded.

Shinkoda et al. (2000) give a more recent and detailed picture of nocturnal sleep times by grade of students in the city of Shimonoseki in Kyushu (see Table 1): While – due to relatively uniform class-starting times – waking time in the morning does not significantly change throughout the school years, bedtime (and therefore sleep length) does. The mean sleep length decreases by almost three hours, from 9:31 to 6:45 hours. The difference in sleep length between weekdays and weekends increases. Standard deviations (*SD*) reflect an enormous diversity among high-school students' sleep patterns.

In terms of bedtime, for children and teenagers there is a remarkably casual attitude as compared to Europe and the USA, where children are taught to go to bed at a fixed time, even if they don't feel tired. Although at kindergarten and

primary school an idea that children should go to bed at around 9 pm is present and in recent years experts and media have shown an increasing concern about children's sleep loss, a strict policy of putting children to bed at a certain time is not nearly so widespread and completely absent in the case of high-school students. Studying provides an important reason to allow children to stay up late or even to demand that they do so. Even though my interviewees and many authors claimed that they strongly believed in the notion of a healthy eight hours' nocturnal sleep, there is the overwhelmingly dominant opinion that the more hours spent studying, the better. They take it for granted that sleep has to be sacrificed for it. It certainly cannot be said that Japanese parents stand in the way of their children's success by keeping them from studying. For example, my interview partner, Mrs Yūzawa, a 50-year-old working-class woman from Kanazawa, stressed how much the children themselves are able to determine their own bed and study times. She gave the following answer to my question of when she sent her four children to bed:

They thought about it themselves. When they were tired, they went to bed. It wasn't set at a certain time. They had to study for exams, there were entry exams. In elementary school, in general, most Japanese children go to sleep at 9 pm, but Hiroyoshi, the oldest, didn't go to sleep at 9 pm; he was still studying. He liked it. He wanted to study. Even if we parents acted as though we didn't notice, this particular child would just study of his own accord. All alone he decided that 'as long as I haven't done that particular thing, I won't go to sleep'. (Interview, 30 November 1994)

The youngest son, who slept with Mrs Yūzawa and her husband in the living room, would simply lie down in a corner and sleep when he was tired, while the father watched TV and the mother attended to household chores. Thus, in this way he learned (or rather, did not unlearn) to regard sleep as something that can be done in the presence of active waking others, or in a polychronic way.

In recent decades, however, it has become common for high-school students to fill their late evenings with more pleasant activities. Most have a room of their own, often with a TV-set, video or DVD player, games, and computer with internet access. Mobile phones and the internet give young people the opportunity to bypass their parents and call up friends at any time of the day and night (Ackermann, 2004: 72–4). Young people also go out at night. Twenty-four-hour convenience stores have become important meeting points for them. There are now more than 40,000 of these shops in Japan (*Kōbe Shinbun*, 2001). They carry a variety of products and are considered safe. Many youths often spend hours in front of the magazine stands and read the latest comics and youth magazines while standing there (*Kōbe Shinbun*, 2001; Ayukawa, 2003: 159–60). With the spread of mobile phones, many parents now have the feeling that they can get in touch with their children at all times and have thus become more permissive (Ayukawa, 2003: 152–4).

A number of students take a job in order to have extra cash for entertainment. Whereas a typical student's job in earlier decades was to deliver newspapers in the morning before school, it is now quite common for them to take a part-time job in a convenience store or fast-food place. High-school students can only work until 10 pm. After this time, there are almost exclusively college students working. Miguel, an Argentinean exchange student at the University of Kyoto, told me that he worked several days a week at a fast-food restaurant until 3 am and afterwards went straight home and fell into bed. His colleagues, however, went to the game halls or one of the 24-hour bookstores after work. They would catch up on their sleep during class (Interview with Miguel, 19 June 1995), and only a few classes are scheduled in the morning. College students are known to have a lot of freedom, but high-school students have to get up and off to school early, even when they have cut down nocturnal sleep. It is during this time that the memorization of countless facts becomes increasingly more important and the time that young people spend in bed decreases drastically.<sup>2</sup> How do they cope?

Using a survey of over 1000 middle- and high-school students from the prefectures of Fukushima and Okayama, Fukuda and Ishihara (2002) conclude that approximately 50 per cent take an afternoon nap at least once a week, whereby the tendency increases with age and there are a significant number of students who take a nap every day. More than 30 per cent take a nap after 5 pm, and a few much later, that is, after they come home from club activities or *juku*, which clearly shifts and shortens the night sleep phase. Another conclusion was the anticipated correlation between late afternoon sleep, late night sleep, and fatigue during the day. In a different survey carried out by doctors in the Akita prefecture (Takemura et al., 2002), approximately 20 per cent of the students said that they take an afternoon nap at least twice a week; and 43.5 per cent said that they sleep at least twice a week during class. A counterbalance for what are seen as inadequate sleeping times also occurs on weekends, when for girls in particular, night sleep is a solid 100 minutes longer per night than during the week (as a whole, girls sleep less than boys).

Mr Nagamatsu, a 48-year-old Tokyo ward official, explained to me how such a rhythm works:

For a time, our children woke up at night to study. After they came home from school, they went to sleep. Then they woke up again and studied and at about 3 am they went to bed. If they had an exam the following day, I told them, 'It is better to wake up early in the morning! You have to make use of the best time in the morning. If you get used to this rhythm, you will become night people and won't be able to concentrate in the morning. It would be better for you to stop now. Study during the day, no matter how tired you are and go to bed early in the evening. Then you are fully aware in the morning'. However, things were similar for me. I got home from school at 3 pm, then I slept. I would wake up again for dinner and

stay awake until 4 or 5 am. Then I would sleep again until about 7 am. So I would sleep two or three hours and then go back to school. That is how my life was during my high-school days. During the day, well actually in the morning, I couldn't concentrate at all. I thought about it and realized that it is not the right way to go about it. It is better to sleep all at once. (Interview, 20 December 1994)

Many others told me of similar rhythms and that their mothers would wake them up at night with tea and a snack so that they could study in peace. (Hence, their mothers were getting even less night-time sleep then they did.)

Although most contemporary studies attribute the rhythm of students that includes late afternoon naps and late night studying to the competitive school system today, it has to be pointed out that high-school students follow historical role models such as Meiji-time statesman, Fukuzawa Yukichi (Kiyooka, 1966: 79), and military doctor and novelist, Mori Ōgai (Muraishi and Yanagida, 1995: 31), who describe a similarly phased sleep in their (auto)biographies. Regardless of possible considerations of whether it makes sense, this rhythm seems to be a set sleeping pattern for students in general, and in particular for high-school students preparing for exams. Since everyone follows a similar rhythm, it is difficult for an individual to change or even seriously question it. This rhythm is maintained by many university students, despite a more leisurely lifestyle, but is rarely found among people who are working full time.

Beside late afternoon naps at home, there are still many other opportunities to compensate for short nocturnal sleep through *inemuri*. Most students nap during their sometimes long commutes to and from school or *juku*. They often sleep in class as well. Asked, 'Do you nap during a school lesson?' almost 80 per cent of the Shimonoseki students quoted in the study above in their last year of high school acknowledged that they slept in class at least sometimes, and more than 20 per cent did so frequently (Shinkoda et al., 2000: 288). Shimonoseki is a rather small town in Kyushu, and one can assume that the percentage of sleepers in cities such as Tokyo, Yokohama, and Osaka – where commutes are longer, competition is greater, the pace of life faster and night-life more seductive – is considerably higher (This assumption has been confirmed by long-term studies in Hiroshima, conducted by Hayashi Mitsuo et al. (personal communication, 26 February 2006)).

When I first conducted field research in the mid 1990s and asked teachers and parents about *inemuri* in class, none showed particular concern. In principle, sleep in class is not desirable, but it is overlooked, since everyone knows how exhausted students are. In recent years, however, some individuals are starting to pay attention to sleep. In summer 2005, Meizen High School in Kurume, Fukuoka Prefecture, introduced a 15-minute voluntary 'naptime' after lunch, during which all students are signalled by a Mozart tune to bend over their desk and sleep (*Asahi Shinbun*, 10 October 2005).



### Students' Sleep Patterns and Purposes of Education

Why does it make sense for young people to reduce sleep during the night, if they are too tired to follow the lessons the next day? The short answer is that the school classroom is not the primary place of education.

One main purpose of (higher) education is to get a job at a major company, which in addition to providing a secure position and chance of advancement also offers a number of social and fringe benefits. These companies recruit their new employees only from elite universities. Admission to such universities, however, is limited almost exclusively to those who attended a good high school, which likewise requires attendance at a good middle school: the higher the level of education, the greater the competition. In short, Japan is an educationally credentialized society. Therefore, more than requiring specific knowledge, belonging to a certain institution is of crucial importance. Each transition is marked by entrance exams, which test an extensive range of factual knowledge. For instance, it is less important that students are able to communicate in English than that they pass the usually very difficult test on English grammar, comprehension and literature. Since the end of the 1990s, a generation marked by lower birthrates is coming of school age, thus admission competition has lessened somewhat and many people are complaining that the average level of knowledge has been lowered. Due to the economic problems and the decline of the life-long employment system, there are also more alternative ways to climb up the career ladder. At the same time, however, the very economic problems and increasing unemployment cause even greater pressure to perform.

The different types of schools vary widely in their styles of instruction. Increasingly, instruction develops from a holistic, child-centred playful learning in elementary school to an almost exclusive transfer of knowledge in high school. There, the teacher's most important task is to support students' attempts to cope with their textbooks. Entrance exams force the teachers to concentrate on the textbooks since these books – and only these books – contain the extremely extensive exam material. Additional knowledge, background information, and contexts are not of interest (Rohlen, 1983: 241–7). Moreover, their extensive teaching and care-taking load does not allow much time for preparation, so many teachers are happy to follow the textbook.

The demand for textbook-centred learning means that students could never memorize the massive amount of facts solely through the lessons at school. Aspiring students attend a *juku*, the private study institutions that prepare them for the exams, and study at home with the help of their school books. The term *juku* can refer to anything from huge institutions with classes of up to 60 students to tuition in small groups at the home of a teacher. Regardless of the size, classes at *juku* are usually engaging. Students like going there (Fukuzawa and LeTendre, 2001: 29–31). I have never been told of students napping there.

Many of these private schools are months ahead of the teaching plan in presenting the material. If students have already mastered the material, the lessons at school don't offer anything new, and, because the young people work late at night, they get sleepy in the rather monotonous lessons. Therefore, often the most industrious students are engaged in *inemuri*.

After an exhausting day at school and *juku*, a break is necessary before one begins homework and study, thus a nap seems appropriate, and so it gets late when they actually start attending to their assignments. A decisive advantage of working at night is the peace and quiet. Young people are better able to concentrate on their studies while everyone else is sleeping. (Of course, they could just as easily spend half the night watching TV, playing computer games, calling up friends or enjoying other forms of entertainment. Parents usually do not control adolescents.) Despite limited sleep at night, they must adjust to the existing time structures of school and other institutions and get up early in order to attend their lessons everyday. To ensure punctuality and a smooth transition from night-time withdrawal to school duties, most schools schedule certain activities before class-starting time: sports, morning call, quiet reading, and the like.

One reason for *inemuri* in class is also that 'it is already a known fact that school is boring', as informant, Matsubara Akira (ca. 40 years old; Interview, 16 September 1994), describes his experience. With this image in their heads, some students go to school with the intention of sleeping. Of course, there are regulations that allow students to miss a certain amount of their classes, but for Japanese study and work ethics alike, 'most important is 100 percent attendance' (White, 1993: 181). Nonetheless, there are differences among teachers and individual subjects. In Japanese and social studies, it is easiest to sleep. English and mathematics are less suitable because one is made to write. The subjects also differ with relation to *inemuri* depending on whether classes are relevant for exams or not. Also for youths who don't have to study for entry exams, a lesson that is meant to impart as much factual knowledge as possible is extremely boring. The result is that many of them fall asleep, even if they weren't up studying the night before. They would prepare themselves and get refreshed for afternoon activities with their friends.

The rather tedious lecturing style at high schools and universities is mandated not only by the fact-laden exam material, but also by the class size of often more than 40 pupils per class and by the small classrooms in middle and high schools. Even if teachers want to actively include all of the students or have them work out the material in groups, it is difficult for them to do so. They can ask only short, knowledge-based questions to determine whether the students have learned anything at all (Rohlen, 1983: 241-70). Many teachers are therefore glad if some of the students are sleeping so that they can work more intensely with those who are interested. In any case, all teachers I asked preferred students who are sleeping to those who are fooling around. Unruly students are disruptive

for the entire class. Students are responsible for whether or not they benefit from the lessons; if they are sleeping, they are not disturbing anyone. Therefore, most teachers do not wake students. Moreover, they 'know' that the evening *juku* and nocturnal learning, especially for the diligent youths, often results in exhaustion. *Inemuri* is therefore not only widely ignored, but students are afforded sympathy because they are dead tired.

What must be emphasized again is that most people consider this type of rhythm entirely normal: 'We don't regard *inemuri* as being impolite towards the teacher who makes an effort to explain things to us, but just sleep, if we feel like it. Our sleep is unconnected to the teacher', is the view one college student referred to me (Yamatsuta Saneyuki; Interview, 2 February 2006). Mrs Hideya, a then 60-year-old housewife from Tokyo, provides an excellent summary in our interview:

We [Japanese] don't take sleep seriously enough. Therefore, we become tired during the day. For this, everyone has learned a sophisticated way to sleep and does this [she supports her forehead on her hand and thereby hides her face under her arm]. At lectures at the university, it is also the same. At Japanese universities, especially at private universities, there are sometimes 500 students. There, no one really notices if someone in the back is sleeping. Some say, yes, they become tired if they listen to a lecture by this teacher or that one and that's why they sleep [laughs]. There are a lot of students who sleep during lectures, I also slept quite often . . . well, in language classes one realizes that it isn't possible to sleep. But if someone simply gives a lecture, you can sleep. Sleeping all the time, well, that has become somewhat characteristic, everyone accepts it. It isn't seen as anything bad. Instead, people say, 'I feel sorry for that person, he must come from far away', or 'He has certainly worked until late into the night'. (Interview, 12 January 1994)

Young people are able to employ this explanatory model cleverly. A woman born in 1962 from Kyoto prefecture explained to me that in middle and high school she always pretended to sleep during class when she was not prepared or had not done the homework. As a result, her teachers did not call on her (Ijiri Yūka; Interview, 17 October 1995). Students, teachers, and parents alike do not usually perceive *inemuri* as sleep in the sense of mental absence from instruction, and therefore do not treat it as a problem. Since this justification for *inemuri* is generally accepted, it also applies for the most part, when the teachers know (basically) that it is not studying alone that causes exhaustion.

### School as a Place of Emotional Attachment

Even though a considerable number of young people feel stressed by their schedules, the required performance and the social relationships at school – and some develop symptoms of school refusal (*kōtōkyōhi*) and social withdrawal

(*hikikomori*; see Kaneko in this volume) – most of them actually like going to school. Most of their leisure and social activities are related to school. Practically all students attend so-called clubs, where they perform sports, do gardening or play music under the guidance of their school teachers. These clubs meet several times a week, including during weekends and school holidays. Schools also organize big sports and cultural events that involve a lot of preparation by groups of students. Therefore, the emotional attachment to schoolmates is very strong. Rebecca Fukuzawa and Gerald LeTendre (2001: 47) found in their study of middle schoolers that the majority of the young people had no friends outside of their school, except for some who had friends at *juku*. More than half of them said that the main purpose for attending classes is meeting their friends. Students from the two high schools, I interviewed in February 2006 confirmed these results. The ones who come to school to meet their friends are likely to nap during classes, their teachers told me.

To put it differently, attending school is not only an obligation and the most secure way to a career, it also provides students with their most important and supporting social environment. The extensive time spent at school minimizes opportunities for developing social bonds and emotional attachment outside. This leads to strong emotional dependence on the social environment of the school. Questioning major assumptions of education and refusing to answer its demands, are possible only at great personal costs, such as by becoming *hikikomori*. The internet offers new opportunities for getting in contact with friends, and it is probably not surprising that people who stay in their room the whole day do communicate with the outside world through the internet. However, as students told me, they mostly correspond with their friends from school.

### **Becoming a Mature Adult: Notions of Time**

Teachers, parents and students alike consider education through organized activities, clubs and daily reports often more important than knowledge-based instruction (LeTendre, 1996: 276–82). When their children go to kindergarten and elementary schools, mothers are required to report morning and evening routines in a notebook on a daily basis. When children are able to write, they have to fill in these reports themselves. Reports of everyday routines are even required during summer vacations. By this, the teacher can make sure that the child's nutrition is appropriate, that they have a regular schedule and a good deal of outdoor play. Teachers exercise a certain degree of control over how time is spent outside school including sleeping times. These reports make children and their mothers actively aware of approved ways in which time outside the institution should be spent. The aim is that children will know this by themselves

once they are in high school and do not need teachers' supervision anymore to internalize appropriate behaviour.

In an article titled 'Strategies for summer discipline that facilitate the independence of children,' published 1987 in the popular NHK monthly *Okāsan benkyōshitsu* (Mother's Study Room), Yoshimura Takeshi stresses how important it is for a child to become independent. Independence means here 'the aptitude to internalize certain habits of self-maintenance that are expected of students in the school environment . . . [or] the development of patterns, skills, and attitudes that enable the child to adapt to and be successful at the labors of school (and later, work)' (Allison, 1996/2000: 109–10). Acquiring a more regular schedule and knowing what to do at what time is part of learning to become an independent, reliable and mature adult.

The use of the word 'discipline', or '*shitsuke*' in Japanese child-rearing books is very common. It is considered necessary to 'raise a human heart' (McVeigh, 2004: 106). Children are trained to empathize with others and be considerate of their feelings. *Shitsuke* is not necessarily imposed by punishment, but often by positive incentives and encouragement. Small children should be taught desirable behaviour by means of 'fun' routines and rewards, such as getting a new toy after cleaning the room, or packaging nutritious food in cute little lunch boxes, all activities which demand more effort from the mother (always the mother, not the father) than the child (Allison, 1996/2000: 110–11).

Japanese educators in and out of school consider character building or discipline to be an utterly crucial component of every type of learning. As university students are well able to understand, self-control and self-management are important characteristics of adults, and related to this is emotional coping, being mature, and being able to take responsibility for their actions. It is the teacher's job to offer guidance, by showing children correct behaviour, thoughts, ways, and social rules (McVeigh, 2004: 102–3, 106).

Nevertheless, 'schooling in Japan involves a surprising amount of suffering' (Kerr, 2001: 289). According to Thomas Rohlen (1996), 'the fundamental logic is that, in order to grow mentally, to mature and be strong in character, one must overcome one hardship or another' (p. 62). Therefore, poring over one's books for hours, making an effort regardless of success, fighting through (*ganbaru*), reducing sleep and getting up early in the morning despite being tired, have a value measured beyond the exclusive consumption and reproduction of knowledge.

One of the means used to overcome inclinations of laziness and punctuality through early rising routines is radio calisthenics. Since 1928, NHK radio has broadcast a 10-minute programme every day at 6:30 am. Primary-school children have to attend every morning during their summer holidays. Thus, they actually wake up earlier than during school days (Linter, 2001; today, the programme runs throughout the year and is especially popular with older people).

After the end of mandatory schooling in high school, such daily reports and calisthenics are the exception. High-school students are already considered able to suppress self-indulgence on their own. They are supposed to know how to get up early despite exhaustion or sleepiness and be on time for school. Thus their bed times are no longer the subject of control. On the contrary, by attending school and *juku* and spending many hours memorizing vast amounts of data, they learn that perseverance and suffering help them to reach their goals; in their case, the entrance to the desired university. They need only a little help to know that hardship, fighting through and overcoming their sleepiness while studying are important ways in which they can embody the work ethic and become a mature and independent person.

The word *ganbaru* (fighting through, giving as much as one can) offers an important hint on the ideas embodied by the work ethic, time use and the essence of diligence. *Ganbaru* refers to a subjective notion of time. Rather than the objective quality of an achievement, the effort one puts into this achievement plays the major role. (This is not to say that ranking of performance is not appreciated.) Since talents are distributed unequally, this understanding of diligence has a comforting aspect for people who do not achieve things as easily. There are several ways in which outside observers judge these subjective efforts. First, one can look at the amount of time spent on a certain task, especially during the night, when working means to sacrifice sleep. Second, one can judge a person's commitment by how busily and intensively one works. And third, the extent of exhaustion caused by the effort can also be an indicator of diligence.

A demand for studying into the night, echoes notions of learning we find throughout Confucian and Buddhist writing, which both emphasize text-related learning. The *Dōjikyō*, for instance, a text book used in schools for commoners during the Edo-period (1603–1867), contains many sayings that children had to write down hundreds of times and memorize. A few lines having to do with sleep are:

- Mornings, get up early and wash your hands;
- Evenings, go to bed late and wash your feet;
- Study literature eagerly during day and night;
- Drilling into the thigh prevents sleep (Kurokawa, 1977: 11).

The final line refers to the Chinese politician, Su Qin, who pierced his leg in order to stay awake at night and thus double his time for studying. He became a role model for students (Richter, 2001: 133–4). Confucian and Buddhist texts regard sleep as something unrelated to physical necessities. Like sex, sleep is treated as a desire or urge which can – and must – largely be controlled by will and effort. Two rationalizations can be found. First, less time for sleep brings more time for waking activities, especially studying, and second, the practice of getting the feelings, desire or drive under control is considered an important

ethical training. It is important to note that pre-modern texts do not make any relation between sleep and performance.

Studying was generally considered a task for which burning expensive oil and shortening one's sleep were justified or even promoted. Wasting oil for mere amusement was severely reprimanded. If today's students enjoy themselves in the night, they are certainly not in line with these Confucian demands. However, starting in the 1970s and supported by the government's leisure development policy, consuming and enjoying oneself has become a kind of duty in contemporary Japan. Thus, as long as work is not being neglected for it, the increasing appreciation of leisure activities is no contradiction to the notion of *ganbaru*. It is rather an extension of its reasoning. A student who is busy with work and play is considered sociable and becomes popular, whereas nobody is interested in meeting someone who is readily available at any time. Many researchers and foreigners have observed that Japanese employees have to appear to be busy and do things fast, whether they are actually busy or not and whether or not they do things efficiently (Levine, 1997: 169–73). A person who appears to be always busy is considered morally superior, since this is a sign of her or his good work and reliability.

As I have already stated, a clear sign of hard work is that the person is exhausted and becomes vulnerable to the 'attacks by the sleep demon', as it is called. People are aware that even the most diligent students are only human, and being human means that they need sleep. Seen from the point of view of biology and medicine, sleep is a requirement, not a vice. (Even in pre-modern times, medical texts co-existed with Buddhist and Confucian texts that had an entirely different view on sleep. They emphasized sleep as something that should be taken in harmony with nature.) It is only natural that exhausted students cannot help but fall asleep when they are sitting in class, listening to monotonous lectures. Sleeping at school is thus practically evidence of late-night studying: a very subtle way of showing off one's commitment and diligence. As long as no active contribution to the class is required, teachers and parents do not only overlook the napping, but even take it for granted (and so do students). As I will explain in the next chapter, people can live with this seeming contradiction between attitudes towards nocturnal sleep and *inemuri*, because they don't consider *inemuri* to be sleep. Socially speaking, *inemuri* is a different phenomenon. Moreover, it is possible to describe *inemuri* as something sociologically distinct from other forms of sleep.

### Sociology of *Inemuri*

*Inemuri* is composed of the Chinese characters for *i(ru)*, to be present, and *nemuri*, sleep (in the physiological sense). That is to say that *inemuri* does not imply a certain body posture, duration or particular amplitude of the brainwaves. Its main characteristic is that the sleeper is present in a situation that is meant for something other than sleep. In that way, *inemuri* is a sociologically distinct form of sleep and has to be differentiated not only from night-time sleep, but also from siesta or napping on a sofa.

In order to further understand *inemuri*, I find it helpful to borrow from Erving Goffman's (1963: 36–8) concept of 'involvement within a situation': 'Involvement refers to the capacity of an individual to give, or withhold from giving, his concerted attention to some activity at hand' (p. 43). This attention is subjective. Outside observers – people present in the same situation as well as the researcher – judge the involvement based on linguistic expression and body idioms. By 'body idioms', what is meant are the appearance and forms of expression of non-verbal communication. No one can avoid giving information to outside persons about themselves and their involvements through their clothing, hairstyle, facial expression, posture and gestures. Goffman differentiates between *dominant* and *subordinate* involvements (among others). This distinction helps us to comprehend *inemuri* in class and to see more clearly the relevant rules. As Goffman states, 'a dominating involvement is one whose claims upon an individual the social occasion obliges him to be ready to recognize; a subordinate involvement is one he is allowed to sustain only to the degree, and during the time, that his attention is patently not required by the involvement that dominates him' (p. 44). Thus, sitting in the classroom in uniform (or whatever dresscode), listening to the teacher, making notes and answering questions, and so on, all belong to the dominant involvement during class. Chatting with one's neighbour in class, sending him/her an SMS or email, drawing comics in a notebook or day-dreaming would be typical subordinate involvements in classes in other countries as well. Although students are not actively listening to what the teacher says, teachers are aware that nobody can pay attention constantly and they are quite willing to overlook this disengagement. Formally, one has to fulfill the duties of attending the session or lecture, but informally there are a number of ways to cope.

I suggest that in the case of Japan, *inemuri* during class, at a lecture, a meeting or a party, can be seen as a subordinate involvement. *Inemuri* is thus a polychronic form of sleep. Subordinate involvements can be found even in societies where monochronism is highly appreciated, although sleep is usually not accepted as one of them. In polychronic cultures, their existence is more widely acknowledged.

The rules for the acceptance and evaluation of *inemuri* are ambiguous. Rules



regarding subordinate involments are hardly explicit and also subject to change. Even for those raised within a certain culture they are sometimes difficult to obey. The power of interpretation is a question of social hierarchies. In any case, *inemuri* must stop as soon as the dominant involvement demands active contribution (Goffman, 1963: 43–79).

One of the main rules of involvement is that the body idioms remain the ones appropriate to the situation at hand: nobody changes into pijamas, and one should take care not to snore and not fall underneath the table. Students still exercise a certain amount of control over their body posture, and will be ready to come back to listening and even answering their teacher's question whenever necessary.

In the meantime, some older professors complain about the bad manners of 'today's young people', as not all students still make the effort to sleep furtively behind a hand. They are obvious about it and lie down with their upper bodies on the desk (Satō Akira; Interview, 19 February 2001). *Inemuri* has become openly acknowledged as part of classroom teaching. The mother of one high-school student in Osaka explained in the *Asahi Shinbun* (2001) how she found out why her daughter brought a thick sweater to school, even in summer. Folded together and put on the table, it served her well as a pillow. Mrs Takeda from Kyoto reports on the latest trend in early November 2002 as follows: 'for about a year now, it has become common that students – already from the third or fourth class of elementary school – take small hand towels from home, fold them neatly, and then put their heads down on them to sleep'. In her days, one still hid behind a book in order to sleep. But, meanwhile, good manners dictate that one takes a towel and folds it neatly (Interview, 5 November 2002).

## Notes

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1. For the NHK time-use surveys, people from 10 years onwards are asked to write every 15 minutes into a diary what they are doing for two consecutive days. Figures do not express physiological sleep. Compared to western Europe and northern America, sleep times in Japan are short (for more detail on the methodology and results on sleep in NHK and other time-use surveys, see Steger, 2004: 113–23, 183–98).
2. According to American medical studies, most adolescents need around nine hours of sleep each night and sleep need does not change across adolescence (from ages 10 to 17). Jenni et al. (2005: 1295) demonstrate that the 'build-up of homeostatic sleep

pressure was slower in mature adolescents compared with prepubertal or early pubertal children'. They conclude that although older adolescents don't feel as sleepy in the evening and thus are more likely to delay their bedtime, they still do need the same amount of sleep.

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